2 Themes that Demand Attention in Good Cross-Cultural Research Studies of Human Behavior

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Culture includes concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and that are widely shared by people. Culture refers to those aspects of the environment that *people make* in contrast to "givens" such as climate, natural reservoirs to hold water, fertility of soil, minerals, and other natural resources. Cultural ideas, values, and assumptions are transmitted generation to generation, but rarely with explicit instruction, by parents, elders, teachers, religious figures, athletic coaches in some cultures, and other adults who have responsibility and authority over children. Generational transmission means that there will be identifiable childhood experiences that lead to the transmission of culture. Once they understand what culture is, adults can sometimes identify aspects of, and events during, their childhood that clearly led to the way they look at the world as encouraged by their culture. Often, key events take place in the school. As Eduardo Casas points out, school curricula may contain ideas about what values a culture emphasizes. Culture, then, refers to agreed-upon concepts and values, as well as widely-shared ways of meeting people's goals, that become familiar and even comfortable among members of the same society. Culture provides guidance for behavior.

The major advantages one gains from conducting cross-cultural and inter-cultural research include the following:

1. Testing the universality of concepts, that is, assessing how useful concepts may be in describing reality in various cultures, for example, the idea that feeling is more frequent in females than in males.

2. Increasing the range of variables that one can find in *any one* culture; culture sometimes gives a narrow range of what is considered a proper way of doing things, e.g., in the United States the typical age of weaning is somewhere between six and nine months; for other cultures it is much later in a child's life.

3. Unconfounding variables that occur in one culture, that is, taking them apart, e.g., by studying the experiences of immigrants, who bring a genetic heritage but then encounter a set of practices they pick up from the second culture. For example, Japanese in Japan don't have rates of alcoholism that one would anticipate from the amount of after-hours drinking they are expected to do as part of their post-workday socializing. Why? Is it genetics? Is it behavioral practices—the practices of drinking in the culture in which they live? The practices seem to influence the way alcohol is used, and these

seem to carry great weight in explaining the phenomenon of low versus high rates of alcoholism.

4. Expanding explanations for observed behaviors. Several explanations may contribute to the same outcomes, e.g., Why are we seeing economic growth in some Asian countries and not others? Are there different roads to economic success? One is individualistic capitalism (e.g., as found in the United States), and the other is a dynamic future-oriented Confucianism (e.g., as found in Japan and Hong Kong). Both roads can lead to economic growth.

5. Observing face-to-face interaction among the people involved, in other words, inter cultural communication. For example, consider Japanese graduate students in the United States adjusting to the American educational system, or American students in Europe adjusting to the unique demands in Europe. What do they complain about? Americans complain about absence of tests—they get only one a year, and if they have friends, they must learn to discuss politics more than in American culture. Japanese complain about the demands to speak up and to contribute their own thoughts in small seminars.

6. Clarifying aspects of one's own culture. This is one of the most interesting aspects of extensive intercultural contact. It occurs even if those aspects are not explicitly covered during the extensive contact. The most probable explanation is that the contact provides many opportunities to ponder contrasts in the type of "guidance for behavior" referred to above. After observing many contrasts, people begin to think about the cultural basis for their own behavior, and this often adds clarification to the question, "Why do we behave as we do?"

7. Sharpening the contribution of culture in well-meaning clashes. People, wherever they are, usually try to get along; if there is a clash, a misunderstanding, it may be cultural. In this kind of situation, the contribution of culture becomes clear.

Casas is probably right in saying that ES [extraverted sensing] is encouraged in the United States. I encourage Asians to develop some E skills, especially public speaking. TP [thinking-perceiving] is probably encouraged in France, and for an American, an innocuous discussion may turn into a deep philosophical clash. In contrast, it is easier to be an introvert in Asian countries, especially among females. Often it is necessary to develop either other preferences and/or behaviors that meet cultural expectations to achieve success in a culture *other than the one* in which a person was socialized.

8. Increasing insights into the contributions of context or situational factors. Because behaviors indicative of personality occur at the same time as the social context in which the behaviors occur, it is hard to separate the two. One grows up in a forest, often unaware of the trees. Comparing cultures allows one to separate the forest from the trees.

KEY IDEAS FOUND IN CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH METHODS

First, one usually can't investigate culture in its entirety. It is too broad. One has to move down to testable hypotheses, and this will involve specific aspects of culture. For example, persistence is rewarded in many Asian cultures. The well-known difference between males and females in the United States regarding achievement in math disappears in Asian countries. The teacher does not want to hear complains about students not liking math! The solution is to work harder. High level Asian business managers asked to identify what they look for in workers quickly focus on reliability and persistence.

Second, one must give careful attention to conceptual equivalents. Do the same words or translation equivalents have the same meaning, the same connotations? Are ideas expanded the same ways? An example is "friend" and "amigo." Are these equivalent terms used as quickly in Venezuela as in the United States? A Venezuelan informant indicates that "amigo" is reserved for special people in Venezuela. They are translations, but they are not used in the same way. One example in the MBTI is the word-pair "foundation-spire." This does not work in other cultures that do not commonly use these words, translation equivalents, or conceptual equivalents.

Third, multiple methods are required. The same idea should be supported by different methods. If it does, one can have more faith in it. For research stimulated by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, one can test the same hypothesis by at least five means: a. personality inventories, b. direct self report, c. reports of well known others, d. behavioral observations, and e. unobtrusive measure (for which there are ethical concerns). We do not want studies that are method-bound.

Fourth, one must pay attention to response sets, the way people respond to questions. For example, on a seven-point scale, some people do not use extremes often; the Japanese don't use 1 and 7 as often as Americans, and if researchers shorten the scale to 1 to 5, they don't use 1 and 5 as often.

Fifth, there is a concern with invasion of privacy. While tests and public opinion polls work well in U.S., with about 95% accuracy, they do not work as well in other countries. The British, for example, are more likely to answer: "It is none of your business!" They prefer to keep their personal opinions personal.

Sixth, the researcher-responder relationship is critical. One needs a long-term relationship, for good data comes out of caring relationships in many cultures. For this reason, it would be a good idea to hire Fs for many cross-cultural research projects.

Seventh, there is another concern about playfulness and rebelliousness. When the relationship between researcher and responder is not long-standing, responders may treat the researcher as a sucker and give nonsensical answers. The interest in harmony in Japan and Korea may not encourage candid answers. The researcher must keep in mind the context in which the work is being carried out.

Eighth, there is a likelihood of encountering culture-specific combinations, also called emic-etic combinations. For many concepts, there will be a combination of a core set of ideas that work well across cultures, but we must add items that help us understand how that concept works in that culture. For example, extraversion and judgment will include core ideas that are useful across cultures, but to understand fully, one must add in other aspects of the concept. Other ideas will be useful to identify extraverts in Japan and Korea. It would be useful to add other items to the MBTI that will pick up unique aspects of extraversion within those cultures. For example, Japanese can express any extraversion they may have at baseball games and at Tokyo Disneyland, but perhaps not in *all* public settings.

Ninth, another key idea involved in cross-cultural research deals with translation. One will need to change language and wording. This seems quite acceptable among MBTI users. But the changes have to be consistent with underlying theory. Further, using the instrument as a research method requires a range of wordings. Any items based on parings of words are really tough. It would be easier to put single-item words into sentences. People will be responding to *what concept* they prefer rather than single words. Long sentences translate much better into other languages, for example, the item involving "benefits" and "blessings." An alternative might be "positive outcomes I earn through my work" and "positive outcomes I did not expect." Adding items to the

original allows researchers to tap the concerns of people in the other culture and to obtain more insight into how the concepts work in that other culture.

Tenth, one must consider direct assessment of intervening variables. If we predict that one of several intervening variables is working, we should assess it directly.

Eleventh, we need to familiarize people so that they are up to par with our research methods. People in other cultures are not as familiar with manipulating objects or filling in the bubbles on a bubble sheet as we are. We need to get them up to a reasonable comfort level with our methods, then do the study.

Twelfth, we need to assess directly the plausible rival hypotheses, or any explanation other than the preferred explanations. One way to do this is to bring in critical colleagues to read drafts of research reports and list as many possible explanations of data as they can think of. Then one can include them in the explanations or rule them out. Plausible rival hypotheses are what editors will cite if they find problems with a submitted article. This approach can take the wind out of their sails. For example, one set of favorites that are often important includes class differences of respondents, income, neighborhood, and job *in addition to* their culture. These must be identified and taken into account.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

While this partial list of needed cross-cultural methodological concerns may seem irritating, they can also be viewed as an exciting set of challenges. Examining how people view important concepts (e.g., introversion-extraversion) in various cultures is admittedly difficult, but any resulting success can lead to important insights into the concepts themselves and ways the concepts work in one's own culture. Another interesting possibility stemming from these challenges is that they can generate continued intellectual excitement in one's research and practical cross-cultural endeavors. I don't know of any cross-cultural researcher who has experienced "burnout" in his or her career. I believe that one reason is that the challenges listed here generate so much effort and enthusiasm that there is no time to become bored. Further, the successes researchers have had (as documented in the three books mentioned on the first page of this paper) have prevented the sense of total frustration that marks burnout. I hope that others will join the excitement provided by the challenges of cross-cultural research.